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NSA Director Lauds 2 Intelligence Panels On Keeping Secrets

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The director of the National Security Agency said yesterday that his codebreaking organization's secrets have been better kept by the House and Senate Intelligence committees than they have been by the executive branch.

Testifying before the House Intelligence Committee, the NSA director, Vice Admiral B. R. Inman (USN), said he had no qualms about discussing even tightly guarded details about NSA "sources and methods" with the two congressional panels set up to oversee the intelligence community.

His views, expressed at a hearing on a proposed legislative charter for the U.S. intelligence community, seemed to contrast sharply with Tuesday's testimony by Central Intelligence Agency Director Stansfield Turner. The CIA director contended that he should not be required to disclose any intelligence sources or methods to the two committees.

The proposed charter would oblige the CIA and all other U.S. intelligence agencies to provide the intelligence committees with whatever information they feel they need. Turner took the position that this would conflict with his existing statutory duty, as director of central intelligence, to protect sources and methods from unauthorized disclosure.

Adm. Inman took no stand on whether full congressional access to information should be required by law—a step that the CIA and the Carter White House strongly oppose—but he said he has always felt free to discuss any NSA secrets with the Intelligence committee.

By contrast, Inman said, "I'm not comfortable with a lot of discussions about sources and methods in the executive branch." He gave no examples, but he said "my experience with these two committees [Senate and House Intelligence] has been better than my experience with the executive branch has been."

Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wis.) said he agreed wholeheartedly and told Inman that "I'm just sorry you weren't here yesterday [Tuesday] morning" when Turner testified.

"That means I'm probably in trouble," Inman replied.

Turner said Tuesday that he would cut his budget for human intelligence collection in half if Congress passed a law requiring full access to information. He said it would have a "chilling effect" on sources abroad.